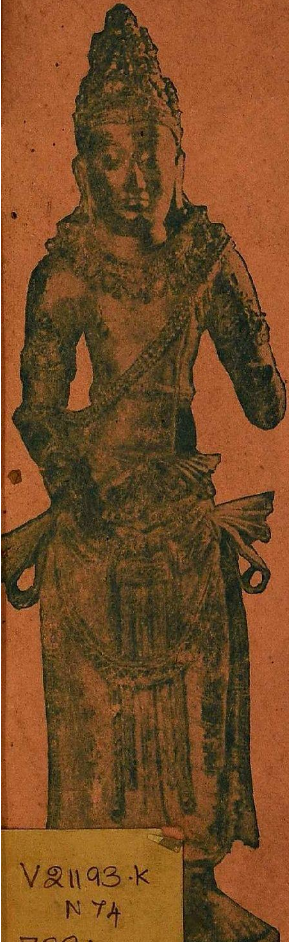
Kaveripoompattinam

A GUIDE



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BY

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Kaveripoompattinam

Pūmpuhār, the celebrated port of the early Chō̤ḷās in the Tamil country was one of the leading international ports at the beginning of the Christian era. The word *Puhār* in Tamil stands for a place where a river enters a sea. Pūmpuhār is the place where the Kāvēri joins the Bay of Bengal.

This city was called by various names in ancient times, "Pūmpuhār", "Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam", "Kākanti", "Campāpathi", "Chō̤ḷapaṭṭiṇam", and "Khaberis Emporion". Ancient Tamil works like *Ahanānūṟu*, *Puṟanānūṟu*, *Paṭṭiṇappālai*, *Śilappadikāram*, *Maṇimēkhalai* and Prakrit texts like *Milindapaṇa*, Buddhist Jātaka tales, *Abhidhammāvatāra*, *Buddhavamsātthakatha* and foreign notices like *Geography* of Ptolemy, the anonymous *Periplus Mari Erithrya* the work of Pliny and ancient inscriptions throw light on this celebrated city.

The ancient name of the city seems to have been "Campāpathi". *Maṇimēkhalai* says the Kāvēri was brought to the city by a chō̤ḷa king and the city renamed "Kāvēripūmpaṭṭiṇam".

Puhār was ruled by eminent kings like Toḍithōṭ Sembian, who destroyed a fortress (Thūngeyil), Muchukunda, Manunīthi Chō̤ḷa, Karikāla and Kiḷḷivaḷavan. A celebrated festival to Indra is said to have been instituted during the reign of Toḍithōṭ Sembiyan. Muchukunda is said to have enshrined a "Bhūta" in the market-place to commemmorate the help he received from it during a war with the "Asuras". Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam must have been enlarged during the reign of Karikāla.

The layout of the city, the names of the streets, groves, gardens etc., are given in detail in *Śilappadikāram.* It is clear this city was built on a well laid out plan, and that it was a fine example of a planned city as early as 100 B.C. From this we learn town planning was highly developed in the Tamil country even before of the Christian era.

It is seen from *Paṭṭiṇappālai*, *Śilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkhalai* that the divine architect, Maya, was held in esteem in Tamiḷnādu. It is likely that the city of Kāveripūmpaṭṭiṇam was planned on the lines of the Maya school of town planning and architecture.

Pūmpuhār was divided into two main parts, Maruvūrppākkam and Paṭṭiṇappākkam. The intervening space with trees was used as a market place. The king and his officers, merchants, cultivators and the army lived in Paṭṭiṇappākkam, while other small traders artisans and labourers lived in Maruvūrppākkam. On the seashore were located the huts of the fishermen and a little away was the settlement of the Yavanas (foreigners). Granaries and storehouses for imported goods were also located in the area.

Many temples dedicated to Gods like Indra, Sūrya, Śiva, and Vishṇu are said to have existed in the city. A Buddhist *Vihāra* and a *Chaitya* were also located in area. *Paṭṭiṇappālai* refers to people from various countries residing amicably at Puhār. *Maṇimēkhalai* refers to artisans from the Magadha, Avanti and Marāṭṭa countries and also Greek sculptors, *Yavanattaccars* working at Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam.

The life of the city seems to have centered around foreign trade. According to Tamiḷ source, high-breed horses came from the western world, while food and other utilitarian objects were imported from Ceylon, China and Malaya. Sandalwood, pepper, precious gems, silk and cotton were exported.

According to *Periplus*, the Chōḷas controlled a major part of the sea trade. Three types of ships frequented the port, the country boats which sailed along the coast upto Damilica on the west coast, the familiar *Catamārans* built of logs of wood and called *Sangara*, and huge ships called *Coḷandia* which sailed to far off countries like Malaya and China.

According to *Maṇimēkhalai* the city was once submerged under the sea. But from the fact that the same text gives a good description of the city, it must be concluded that either the entire city was submerged and rebuilt after the sea had receded or only a part of the city was engulfed by the sea. The latter seems to be more probable. So it must be taken that this city lost its importance through the centuries.

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The earliest reference to Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam is noticed in a prakrit inscription of 2nd century B.C., found at Bārhūt in Northern India. The inscription refers to the gift of a stone slab for an enclosure of a *stūpa* by a Buddhist nun called Sōma, who hailed from the city, Kākandi.

Kākandi according to *Maṇimēkhalai* was one of the names of Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam. It is said that when Parasurāma was destroying the Kshatriya race, the then Chōḷa king of Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam, Kandan by name, entrusted the care of the city to Kākandan, a son of a Ganika, and retired to the forest.

Ever since the city came to be called Kākandi. The *stūpa* at Bārhūt was originally erected by Asōka and was enlarged in the time of the Suṅga Kings in 2nd century B.C. That a Buddhist nun from Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam had gifted a slab, as early as 2nd century B.C., shows that Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam was a highly flourishing city and that it served as an important Buddhist centre at the time. Evidently, the missionary activity of Asoka should have left its impact on the city of Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam, and ever since it continued to be an important Buddhist centre till at least 8th century A.D.

All the prakrit references to this city come from Buddhist sources. The celebrated book *Milindapana* dealing with the questions of Mīāndar, and the answers of Bikku Nāgasēna, refers to this city as Kōlapaṭṭiṇa, one of the best known ports of the time.

The *Milindapana* is ascribed to the beginning of the Christian era. In a Buddhist Jataka, a certain Akitti is said to have lived in a garden near Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam.

The Prakrit texts Abhidhammāvatara and Buddhavamsāttakatha, written at Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam, by about 400 A.D. attest to the flourishing nature of the city port. The author of the above works, Buddhadatta by name, was a great grammarian and an accomplished poet of his time, and has written another prakrit text called *Vinayaviniccaya*. From the last mentioned work it is learnt, that Buddhadatta spent sometime at Bhūtamaṅgala in the Chōḷa rāshtra, when Acchuta Vikkanta of Kalabhrakula was ruling the Chola country.

Accut accuta vikkante Kalabhrakulanāndane
Mahim samanusasante arabdho ca samāpito

The Kaḷabhrās, seem to have captured the Chōḷa country in the fifth century A.D. and were thrown out in the sixth century, by the rising powers of the Pallavas in the North and the Pāṇḍyas in the South.

Acchuta Vikkanta seems to have been a great ruler, extending his support to Buddhism. From the description of Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam, given in *Abhidhammāvatāra* and *Buddhavamsāttakatha*, it is learnt that it was still in a flourishing state in 400 A. D. though the trade with the Rōman country has touched a low mark, following the fall of the Roman empire.

In both the works, Buddhadatta gives identical description of Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam.

Nānāratna sampunnē vividhāpana sangate
Kāvēripaṭṭaṇe ramme nānārāmopsobhite
Kalāsikharākara pāsada patimandite

" Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam was inhabited by men and women of noble descent. The city was complete in all aspects and presented a beautiful appearance. There were many bazaars, selling various goods.

Precious gems of various types were available in plenty. The city was full of lofty and palatial mansions, beautiful with entrance towers.

There were many groves, pleasing to the eyes. There was the crystal like Kāvēri and the cool sea, adding to the beauty of the city.

A certain noble, named Kaṇahdāsa, built a beautiful *vihāra* there with enclosures and elegant turrets."

Buddhadatta states that he wrote the *Abhidhammāvatāra* and *Buddhavamsāttakatha*, while residing at a cool and pleasant part of the *vihāra* which was very ancient.

It is evident that a great *Buddha vihāra* was erected at Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam, by about 400 A.D.

Maṇimēkhalai refers to *Indra vihāram ēḻu* which is taken to mean seven *vihāras* built by Indra.

Buddhadatta does not refer to foreign traders in Kāvēripaṭṭiṇam. As mentioned earlier the trade with Rōme ceased to be effective, and no Rōman coins have been found in South India which could be dated after

3rd century A.D. But Maṇimēkhalai refers to the Yavanas. It is therefore evident that Maṇimēkhalai should be ascribed to a period, when Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam was still trading with Rome. Buddhadatta's works indicate that Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam was also a great centre of Prakrit learning.

The Pallavas slowly extended their power to the South and Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam was included in the Pallava territory. The temple of Pallavaniśvaram should have been built sometime in the beginning of 6th century A.D. by a Pallava monarch, whose name is not known.

However a great part of the Chōḷa country was annexed to the Pallava rule in the reign of Simhavarman, the father of Simhavishṇu and the temple might have come into existence during his period.

For in the beginning of 7th century A.D. Appar and his younger contemporary Gñānasambandar have sung the Lord of this city. From these hymns it may be gathered that Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam has not lost its importance.

In the 8th century A.D. Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam continued to be under the sway of the Pallavas. In the reign of Rājasimha, the celebrated builder of the Kailāsanātha temple of Kāñchi, a *Buddha vihāra* is said to have been erected at Nāgapaṭṭiṇam, further south of Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam. Rājasimha is said to have ruled extensive territories which included even Lakadive Islands.

Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam by virtue of its stratagic importance, should have played a leading part during this period. A beautiful gilded image of Bōdhisattva Maitrēya, found at Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam, now preserved in the Madras Museum, must be assigned to this period.

From the beginning of this century scholars have been taking great interests in this ancient port. As early as 1910, the District collector of Thanjāvūr excavated the city and exposed some wells close to the sea. "The Annual Report of the Archaeological Department", Southern circle, Madras, for 1910–11 says, "A slight excavation conducted last year by the collector of the District exposed some wells close by the sea. Besides these, when excavating this year, a brick well on the sea side was also noticed. The wells existing near the coastline have fine hard clay surroundings over the burnt earthern walls called *Oṛaikiṇaṛu* and the same arrangements occur over the brick wells. Probably this arrangement of enclosing mud is to prevent salt water percolating into them.

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From the presence of this well it must be inferred that there should have been habitations adjoining them. There are also two mounds near the Pallavanīśvaram temple and two near the Campāpati temple, which have been selected for further excavation if possible".

Though many private institutions and scholars evinced interest, there was no scientific excavation for a long time after. In 1961, the Archaeological Survey of India excavated the site and continued the excavations for three seasons. Even a small-scale excavation has yielded remarkable remains and antiquities. Maṅgaimādam, Veḷḷaiyan iruppu, Maṇigrāmam, Pallavanīsvaram and Vānagiri have so far been excavated.

Of the structures so far exposed, two deserve mention. One is a wharf, found at Kīḷaiyūr. Wooden posts have been discovered in situ. These were probably used to tie the boats. *Paṭṭiṇappālai* gives a graphic description of a wharf where country boats laden with paddy were tied to rows of pegs. It is likely the wharf now exposed is one such thing of ancient times.

The other structures of interest is a part of a Buddha *viāhra*, over sixty feet long and with square chambers. Unfortunately the entire area could not be exposed since it is covered by an extensive residential portion.

A *Buddhpāda*, carrying Buddist symbols like *Śrīvatsa*, *Pūrṇakalasa*, *Swastika* etc., was also found in the area. The *Buddhapāda* is carved of limestone. A big capital of a pillar made of brick and mortar, and moulded bricks have been unearthed. A remarkable stucco head of a Buddhist deity, also discovered in this area, speaks to the achievement of the artist in stucco art. Both *Silappadikāram* and *Maṇimēkhalai* pay tribute to the stucco artists who are called *Maṇṇīṭṭāḷar*.

Interesting terracotta figures, glass bangles, precious and semi-precious stones etc. have been unearthed in this area. Coins of square and circular shapes have also been found. A Roman copper coin has been discovered at Veḷḷaiyan Iruppu which confirms the literary references to the precence of foreigners in the city. Coins of Rājarāja, the Chōḷa have also been found during the excavation.

A few antiquities, picked up on the shores of Kāvērippaṭṭṇam, are now with the Shanti Sadana Trust of Madras. A remarkable terracotta figure of 'mother and child' and a terracotta lamp are now in the collection. There are also a number of coins of copper.

In one type of coin a tiger is seen standing, with its front paw raised and the tail curved at the back. Over its head is a sun motif. The Tiger is the emblem of the Chōḷas and this type is considered to have been the type under circulation during the reign of Karikāla. The reverse of the same coin shows a standing elephant, indicating the conquest of the Koṅgu country by the Chōḷas. Another type of coin, also square in shape, bears a *chaitya vṛksha* on the obverse and an indistinct emblem on the reverse. The *chaitya vṛksha* clearly shows the influence of Buddhism at the period. There are also potin coins and a small coin, bearing two letters reading "AW". The import of these coins is not clear.

Kāvērippūmpaṭṭiṇam had extensive commercial contact with Far-East. This is attested by a find of a Tamiḻ inscription and a few sculptures in a place called Takua Pa in lower Siam. The place is situated on the west coast.

The ancient name of Takua Pa is Takkōlam referred to as such by Ptolemy in his geography. A Chinese work of the 3rd century A.D. mentions this port as Thaku-li-C, from where Su-Wu, an ambassador of the King of Fu-Nan, is said to have left for India. The place is also mentioned in Rājēndra's conquests as Talaittakkōlam.

But the most important find is the Tamiḻ inscription which refers to a mercantile guild, Maṇigrāmam and mentions a Vishṇu temple and a tank called Avani Nāraṇam, which were placed under the protection of a Sēṇamaka, army.

Prof. K. A. N. Sastri, who has edited this inscription has rightly assigned it to the reign of Nandivarman III, the victor of Teḷḷāṟu. Nandi bore the significant title Avaninārаṇan and is said to have maintained a powerful naval fleet. The inscription was not found in Takua Pa port proper, but in a place about 10 miles inside the land on the Northern bank of Takua Pa river.

Besides this inscription a group of stone sculptures bearing Pallava features were also found in the same area. They are referred to by the local people as Pra Narai. The group consists of three sculptures, a standing four-armed male deity, a female deity and a bust of a male figure which have all become embedded, in the trunk of a

large tree. Nearby are fragments of sculptures, one relating to these three figures, an uncompleted sculpture of a seated figure and other fragment.

On the south bank of the Takua Pa river, opposite to these sculptures are to be seen the remains of an ancient structure, and according to the local people the Pra Narai group of sculptures came from this ancient structure. We have seen that the inscription refers to a temple tank called Avanināraṇam.

The present name Pra Narai, given to the group by the local tradition, seems to be the shortened from of Pṛthvi Nāraṇam, a Sanskrit equivalent of the word Avanināraṇam, recorded in the inscription.

The four-armed standing figure can be identified as an image of Vishṇu, as clear traces of a Śrī Vatsa symbol is visible on the right chest. The portrayal of the arms and the garments resemble Vishṇu sculptures of the Pallava period in the Tamiḷ country. The sculpture of the goddess found along with this is evidently Bhūdēvi.

It is interesting to note that the Tamiḷ inscription found here also refers to Nāṅgūr. Nāṅgūr in the Chōḷa country is situated very near Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam and was an important centre from very early times.

The Chōḷa Emperor, Karikāla took to wife, a Vēḷir princess of Nāṅgūr. Tirumaṅgai Āḷwar who lived in the 8th century A.D. has praised the heroism of the warriors of Nāṅgūr in his poems. The Takua Pa inscription mentioning Nāṅgūr is dated not long after Thirumaṅgai Mannan.

This brings us to another interesting field of enquiry in the history of the Tamiḷ country. At Kāvērppaṭṭiṇam, the ancient port of the Tamiḷ country, there is a suburb even now called Maṇigrāmam, on the southern bank of the river. We have seen that the inscription at Takua Pa, besides mentioning Nāṅgūr mentions Maṇigrāmam.

The reference to Nāṅgūr and Maṇigrāmam unmistakably suggest that a mercantile guild from Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam left on their Eastern voyage from Puhār with a strong contingent of warriors from Nāṅgūr who were

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known for their valour. It has been mentioned earlier that Kāverip-paṭṭiṇam was still a flourishing place in the reign of Rājasimha Pallava in the 8th century A.D. as reported by the find of a gilded Bhōdisatva Maitrēya.

The Takua Pa inscription must be dated within 100 years of this period. Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam continued to flourish in the reign of Nandi, the victor of Teḷḷāṛu. As mentioned earlier Nandi maintained a powerful naval fleet and what is more the Nandikalambakam a contemporary work on Nandivarman refers to him as the ruler of Puhār.

So far as the Tamiḻ country was concerned, Kāvērippaṭṭiṇam continued to be a port of importance till at least 9th century A.D., while Takua Pa in Siam played an important role as a connecting link between the Tamiḻ country and Far-East. (The Hindu 13-8-1967, 22-10-1967)

Indra Festival

The revival of the festival of Indra in Kaveripumpattinam in 1973 marks an important land mark in the history and culture of the Tamil people. The ancient Tamil epics, Silappadhikaram and Manimekalai, make pointed reference to the celebrations of this festival in Kaveripumpattinam. Particularly the Silappadhikaram gives a graphic description of the celebrations.

According to Tamil traditions Indra is the presiding deity of the pastoral regions and is the giver of plenty. It is seen that the festival marks the beginning of Spring with the entire landscape putting on an agreeable look with green plants and blossoming flowers. The chapter on Indra vizha in Silappadhikaram makes it clear that this is a spring festival. It is called *Venil vizha* in Tamil and Vasanta utsava in Sanskrit. It falls in the month of Chitra, April-May. Particularly the full moon day in the month of Chitra, i.e. Chitra Pournami is the most celebrated day for the festival. The Indra vizha at Kaveripumpattinam is said to have been celebrated on Chitra Pournami day, which incidentally coincided with the asterism Chitra, "Chitirai Chitirai tingal sernthathu".

The incoming of spring and tender breeze, infuses the spirit of romance in human heart. This particular season is chosen for social mingling and pursuit of carnal pleasures. Thus the festival of Indra also marks the beginning of the festival of Kama, the God of love. Even to

this day the festival of Kaman Pandigai is celebrated in a number of places in Tamilnadu, in the month of Chitra and Vaikhasa.

According to Sanskrit tradition the great sage Bharata is said to have taught his treatise on Natya in the festival of Indra. It is of interest to note that the story of Silappadhikaram, centers round Madhavi, an accomplished dancer. According to Tamil tradition the celebration of the festival of Indra is intended for fulfilling two aims. Firstly the proper celebration of the festival is said to bring fertility, wealth and pleasures to the inhabitents of the city. Secondly and perhaps more vitally, it is said to bring prosperity to the kingdom. Silappadhikaram refers to these roles of Indra vizha in a number of places.

The celebrations are detailed in Silappadhikaram. The festival began at the temple of Vajrayudha, the weapon of Indra. The festival drum from the temple, was ceremoniously placed on a decorated elephant and taken in procession to the temple of Airavata, the mount of Indra. There the inauguration of the festival is announced by beating the drum by a Valluvan. In a temple of Asvatha tree, (the divine tree), a flag was hoisted to mark the beginning. The flag carried on it the painted figures of Airavata and the eight auspicious symbols. Soon after princes, business men, commanders, administrators and others offered worship for the prosperity of the kingdom.

Auspicious water from the river Kaveri was brought and the Vajrayudha of Indra was anointed.

The women of the Marava community offered worship on this occasion. Their offerings consisted of flowers, incence cooked rice mixed with blood of sacrificed animals, liquor etc. and at the end they performed the folk dance called tunangai. The Maravan representing the heroes, made supreme sacrifices on this occasion. They cut their own head and offered it on the altar. They considered such an offering brought fertility to the country and prosperity to the kingdom. Such a practise seems to have been very common in ancient days as literature is full of such references. In sculptures too we find heroes portrayed at the foot of Durga, offering their own head. An inscription also of ninth century speaks of such a sacrifice. It is evident that heroes were prepared to offer such supreme sacrifices for the welfare of the society.

The Indra Vizha according to Manimekhalai was celebrated for seven days when people forget their worries and delighted themselves in pleasures. On these occasions festivals were performed in all the temples. People gathered in large numbers to listen to the exposition of doctrines of various sects. Religious dialogues, literary disputations, staging of dramas were quite common.

It is of interest to mention that most of the well known Sanskrit dramas were written for being enacted on Indra Festivals. Malavikagnimitra of Kalidasa, Ratnavali, and Priyadarsika of Harsha, Vasantika parinaya of Sathani are only a few examples which were thus composed. That Vasantotsava and Indrotsava are identical is attested by Harsha who mentions it as Indrotsava in his Nagananda. Varadacharya in his Vasanta tilakabana refers to Makara dhvayapujotsava, namely the festival of Kama, which incidentally shows the close association of Kaman Pandigai with Indra Vizha. The celebrated Bharatam in Tamil by Villiputturar, has a Sarga itself named after Vasanta. That this Indra Vizha seems to have been popular even in 10th Century A.D. is attested by an inscription from near Kalashasti. It refers to an endowment, made for the celebration of Indra Vizha in the reign of Parantaka Chola. The Indra vizha is a unique festival, which is celebrated to extol the nature, which brings forth joy and happiness to people by its seasonal change.

According to Manimekhalai, the Indra festival was instituted by one Chola king Thodittod Sembiyan the victor of Tingayil.

It is of interest to mention that the work Manimekhalai begins with the announcement of Indravizha.

The river Kaveri enters the sea

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